



# Radioactive Iodine (I-131) Hyperthyroid Therapy: Reducing Exposure 21-30 mCi Patients

In the days after your radioactive iodine (I-131) therapy, you will need to take steps to prevent radiation exposure to others.

## How can I prevent external radiation exposures?

Because of the radioactive medicine you received, your body will give off radiation (similar to an X-ray). This will decrease with time and will eventually go away. Until then, you can reduce radiation exposures to people around you by:

- **increasing your distance** from them
- **decreasing the time spent** close to them

Below is a list several **precautions** (actions to lower risk) you should take to prevent radiation exposure to others. The table shows a range for how long you may have to follow each precaution. How long you need to follow these precautions depends on the amount of radioactive medicine you received, which your clinic doctor will decide after your scans. Please follow your specific precaution instructions after receiving treatment.

The following table lists the precautions for patients who received **21-30 mCi** units. The left column describes the precaution and the right column shows the number of days you need to follow the precaution.

Precautions	Number of days
Sleep in a separate bed from other adults (at least 6 feet away from others)	8 days

Sleep in a separate bed from pregnant partners, babies, or children	20 days
Avoid being in close contact with children and pregnant people (stay at least 6 feet away)	2 days
Keep a safe distance from others (about 3 feet)	2 days
Drink plenty of liquids (like water and juices)	2 days
Wait to go back to work	2 days
Avoid spending more than 1-2 hours in public places	1 day
Avoid traveling in close small groups (such as in a car, where you are sitting within 3 feet of others) for any longer than 2 hours	1 day
Do not travel by airplane or mass transportation (bus, train, etc.)	6 days
Do not travel on a long (6 or more hours) car trip with others	6 days

### **How can I prevent internal radiation exposures?**

It's possible that a small amount of the radioactive medicine you received could be transferred to others near you. This could happen through body fluids like pee, saliva (spit), and sweat. This risk is low, but following these precautions for 2-3 days will help reduce it even more.

- Avoid mouth-to-mouth contact.
- Do not share items that come into contact with your mouth (like toothbrushes and eating utensils).
- Use separate or disposable eating utensils, and wash them separately.
- Use a separate bathroom from others, if possible.
- Sit down whenever you use the toilet (rather than peeing standing up) for 3 days. Keep the toilet very clean.
  - Flush it 2-3 times after each use.

- Keep small children away from the toilet area.
- Always wash your hands well after using the toilet so you don't spread radiation or germs to door handles or other items in your home.
- For 3 days after treatment, flush any tissue paper that contains anything from your body (such as blood, pee, or poop) down the toilet.
- Shower every day for at least the first 3 days after treatment.
- Drink often and stay well-hydrated before, and for at least 2 days after, your therapy. You should be peeing often.
- We strongly recommend that you have a bowel movement every day. Use a laxative if necessary.
- Wash your laundry separately from the laundry of other members of your household for 3 days. You do not need to use bleach and do extra rinses. This includes:
  - Sheets
  - Towels
  - Washcloths
  - Pajamas
  - Underwear
  - Clothes that have sweat, blood, or pee on them
- Avoid sexual activity for 7 days.
- All genders must use effective birth control methods during the treatment and for 6 months after.
- Try to avoid using a public restroom for the first few times you pee or poop after your therapy.
- We strongly recommend you do not stay in a hotel in the first 3 days after your therapy.

If you have any questions, please contact the Thyroid Clinic at (734) 232-6072.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by University of Michigan (U-M) Health for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by U-M Health and for which U-M Health does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Authors: Meghan Doyle, RN BSN, Margherita Vicari, FNP-BC, Ka Kit Wong, MBBS  
Edited by: Brittany Batell, MPH MSW

Patient Education by [U-M Health](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 12/2023